

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Desert Communities Empowerment Zone

It was one year ago, on January 13, 1999, that Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman announced the five (5) Round II Rural Empowerment Zone designations - the most important one being our own Desert Communities Empowerment Zone. That designation was the culmination of an unprecedented community-based, grass-roots effort by the stakeholders and residents in eastern Riverside County to establish a process and mechanism to effect long-term positive change and improve the quality of life of all residents.

The hardest challenge of receiving this designation was that we were literally starting from scratch. We had no guide book, no step-by-step directions, nor any procedures available to follow, especially to form a community-based organization representing such a vast geographic region - an area with varying demographics, socio-economic conditions, cultures, experiences, and traditions, as well as needs, problems, and opportunities.

However, we have moved forward with very little staff and not one dollar of Empowerment Zone funding spent. To date, we have accomplished the following:

1. Organized and formed the Board of Directors and elected Officers;
2. Developed and adopted our DACE bylaws
3. Established and incorporated our community-based nonprofit corporation;
4. Adopted the initial two-year \$4 million budget for EZ funding;
5. Received our 501 (c)(3) tax exempt status from the IRS;
6. Established our banking and financial services;
7. Developed our Sponsor's Agreement for the use of our DCEZ funds;
8. Executed the Memorandum of Agreement with USDA;
9. Executed the EZ Grant Agreement with EDA;

Unfortunately, the Empowerment Zone designation did not include the \$40 million as expected . Instead, our future EZ funding is in doubt, requiring our DCEZ to slightly alter course. We must scale back our expectations and invest more time and effort into securing other non-EZ resources to further the implementation of our Strategic Plan.

Despite these setbacks, our belief in the Empowerment Zone philosophy and concept remains strong. The DCEZ is committed to the implementation of the strategies identified in our Strategic Plan, and the pursuit of our overall vision to improve the quality of life for all residents.